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AUTHOR Kendall, Elizabeth L.
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ABSTRACT

Nontraditional and traditional secondary vocational education program completers in West Virginia were surveyed to determine their attitudes toward their school preparation, work, and encountered work barriers. A questionnaire was mailed to 100 nontraditional and 100 traditional program completers, and a 10 percent sample was contacted by telephone. Most completers enrolled in their vocational education program because the "program sounded interesting" and they "wanted to try out the field." The large majority liked their vocational experience and would recommend their program to a friend. More traditional than nontraditional completers would choose the same program again. The vocational teachers were influential in the decision to enroll in a vocational education program. The respondents revealed, however, that once enrolled the vocational teacher did not provide as much support as they wanted. Respondents also perceived that their parents supported their vocational choices. The nontraditional completers had the most opposition and the least support for their choices. Since completing their program, twice as many nontraditional completers had not been employed. The majority of completers were unhappy with their salary and advancement potential. Study findings supported prior research that guidance counselors are of little help to vocational students. Completers also perceived differential treatment by vocational teachers. More barriers were reported as existing in the work environment for nontraditional than for traditional completers. (YLB)

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ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL PREPARATION AND WORK BARRIERS OF NONTRADITIONAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMPLETERS

Elizabeth L. Kendall, Ph.D.
School of Home Economics
The University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona 87521

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes of a random sample of nontraditional and traditional secondary vocational education program completers in West Virginia toward their school preparation, work and encountered work barriers. A survey instrument was mailed and a sample of the nonrespondents was contacted by telephone. Descriptive and chi-square statistics were used for analyses. Most of the completers enrolled in their vocational education program because the "program sounded interesting" and they "wanted to try out the field." The large majority like their vocational experience and would recommend their program to a friend. The vocational teachers were influencial in the decision by the respondents to enroll in a vocational education program. The completers perceived that their parents supported their vocational choice. However, the nontraditional completers had the most opposition and the least support for their choices. Twice as many nontraditional, as traditional, completers had not been employed since completing their program. Also, violent language was the most frequently experienced behavior on-the-job. The majority of completers were unhappy with their salary and advancement potential.

ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL PREPARATION AND WORK BARRIERS OF NONTRADITIONAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMPLETERS

Eliminating sex stereotyping, providing sex equity and allowing people to enter nontraditional occupations have been issues that have received much attention from the news media and Congress. Many vocational education programs have historically attracted only one sex, such as males in masonry and females in home economics. However, in recent years, students have been encouraged to enroll in vocational education programs that are nontraditional for their sex. This has resulted because of changing sex roles in society and legislative action of the Congress with the 1976 Educational Amendments to the 1963 Vocational Education Act.

Therefore, women can enroll in traditionally nonfemale programs and men can enroll in traditionally nonmale programs, or can they? Examination of current enrollments by Schenck (1977) and PEER (1979) indicate that females are still enrolling in traditionally female programs and males are enrolling in traditionally male programs.

Several studies can be identified where researchers investigated means of encouraging students to enter nontraditional programs (Lerner et al., 1976; Lawson, 1977). Evans (1979) identified problems encountered by nontraditional students while enrolled in a vocational program. Other researchers found that problems and attitudinal barriers existed for students who wanted to enter courses thought to be nontraditional for their sex (Rieder, 1977; Weitz, 1977; Green, 1979; Vetter et al., 1979).

Purpose

This study analyzed the attitudes of nontraditional and traditional vocational education completers toward their school preparation, work, and encountered work barriers in obtaining employment after completing their vocational program. Males enrolled in a typically female program and females enrolled in a typically male program were identified as nontraditional completers.

The objectives of the study were to:

1) identify factors that led to students enrolling in vocational programs.
2) describe attitudes toward:
   - satisfaction with their program
   - supportiveness of influencial individuals
   - problems in seeking, obtaining, and keeping employment.
3) compare nontraditional and traditional vocational completers on attitudes toward:
   - school
   - school preparation
   - work
   - work barriers.

Research Method

The population was the 1980 vocational education program completers in West Virginia from the vocational programs which had both nontraditional and traditional enrollments. A nontraditional vocational education program was defined as one with 20% or less enrollment by one sex. Using this procedure, there were 53 programs identified as enrolling students

in nontraditional programs. From the 53 programs, two separate samples were drawn: (a) a random sample of 100 of the 208 nontraditional completers (48%); and, (b) for comparison a random sample of 100 traditional completers from the same school and program as the selected nontraditional completers (n=1336, 7%).

The questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts to establish content validity. The questionnaire was pretested in a vocational program where both males and females were enrolled. Reliability coefficients were determined by the Cronbach Alpha technique for perception of school preparation and attitudes toward school, for both the pretest sample and for the final responding sample. The questionnaire was found to be reliable (Nunnally, 1967). Also, for the responding sample, the Cronbach Alpha technique for perception of work barriers was found to be reliable.

One hundred nontraditional and 100 traditional vocational completers were mailed the questionnaire ten months after their program completion. A follow-up questionnaire was mailed to all nonrespondents. Efforts were made to locate the vocational completers whose questionnaire was returned undelivered by the postal service. Telephone calls were also made to a 10% sample of the traditional and nontraditional nonrespondents to collect the data. Chi-square analysis showed no statistical difference between the nonrespondents and respondents.

The questionnaire contained the following variable sets:

- employment history (Short answers, Checklists)
- perceptions of teacher interest in students (Likert Scales)
- availability of job information (Likert Scales)

- employment advancement potential (Checklist)
- job satisfaction (Likert Scales)
- attitudes toward school and work (Likert Scales)
- perceptions of work barriers (Likert Scales, Checklist)
- demographic data (Checklist, Completion).

Response rates used in data analysis were: nontraditional sample = 36%, traditional sample = 42%. Chi-square statistics were used for the group comparisons and the comparison-wise error rate should be considered in interpreting the results.

Results

Enrollment Factors. The most frequent responses by the respondents for selecting their vocational education program were "program sounded interesting," "wanted to try out this field," "thought I would like the work," and "wanted to learn a skill to prepare for a job." There were ordinal differences in the responses between the traditional and nontraditional completers. The nontraditional respondents enrolled in their program because the "program sounded interesting," while the traditional respondents "wanted to learn a skill." From the data, the nontraditional respondents were not motivated by as great a variety of factors for enrolling in the vocational program as the traditional completers. Apparently, the nontraditional completers lack information on nontraditional career opportunities.

Over three-fourths of the completers perceived that it was appropriate for females to be encouraged to enroll in traditional male courses and for males to enroll in traditional female courses. However, more

nontraditional completers responded favorably to this encouragement than did the traditional completers.

Satisfaction and Attitudes Toward School Preparation. More than 90% of the nontraditional and traditional completers liked their vocational education experience. The majority of the respondents would choose the same program again. However, more traditional than nontraditional completers would choose the same program again. The large majority indicated that their vocational teachers were interested in their progress and were good teachers. Also, 91% of the traditional respondents and 89% of the nontraditional respondents would recommend their vocational program to a friend.

Supportiveness of Influencial Individuals. The vocational teachers were influencial in the decision by the respondents to enroll in a vocational education program. However, the respondents revealed that once enrolled, the vocational teacher did not provide as much support as they wanted. The nontraditional vocational completers experienced more opposition and the least support for their career choice. According to the respondents, over two-thirds of the parents supported the traditional choice while slightly more than half supported the nontraditional choice. Also, the nontraditional completers indicated the guidance counselors were of very little or no help to them.

Twenty-five percent of the nontraditional completers and 17% of the traditional completers indicated they had been treated differently from others by their vocational teachers. More nontraditional respondents indicated they were treated differently from others by their classmates than did the traditional respondents (39% and 17% respectively).

Employment and Education Status. Ten months after program completion, half of the nontraditional and traditional vocational completers were employed (56% and 57%, respectively). Twice as many nontraditional completers had not been employed since completing their program (28% vs. 12%). Also, approximately one-third of the nontraditional and traditional respondents were continuing their education as full-time or part-time students.

Employment Constraints. Two-thirds of the nontraditional and traditional female completers perceived that they were required to do work which was not required by their male counterparts. However, half of the males agreed they were required to do work that was not required by their female co-workers. The majority of completers indicated that their present supervisor was interested in their progress.

Forty-four percent of the nontraditional completers revealed they were unhappy with their salary and 63% were unhappy with their job advancement potential. However, 36% of the traditional completers were unhappy with their salary and 44% were unhappy with their job advancement potential. Although 30% of the nontraditional respondents and 22% of the traditional respondents reported they had received a formal job advancement excluding any salary increase.

The most frequent behavior experienced by the completers was violent language (43%). Other behaviors indicated by the respondents were: not being kept up-to-date on information (nontraditional = 43%; traditional = 36%), unfair ratings on work performance (nontraditional = 32%; traditional = 39%), and difficulty getting time off (nontraditional = 29%;

traditional = 39%). Also, 25% revealed they had experienced insults or innuendos after completing their vocational education program.

Educational Importance of The Study

This study identified factors that completers of secondary vocational education programs perceived to impede them in obtaining their vocational career goals because they were a nontraditional or traditional completer. These perceived constraints were related to their school preparation and work barriers encountered upon seeking, obtaining, and keeping a job. These findings suggest substantial problems for secondary students entering programs considered nontraditional for their sex.

The findings support prior research that guidance counselors are of little help to vocational students. Also, the nontraditional unemployment rate is higher than the traditional unemployment rate.

Although the vocational teachers were helpful in the enrollment decision by the completers, the teachers did not provide as much help or support after enrollment as the completers wanted. Also, the completers perceived differential treatment by their vocational teachers. Thus, vocational teachers may need to be made more aware of their overt and covert actions. In reality, these teachers may not realize they are treating the students differently.

From the research, more barriers exist in the work environment for the nontraditional than for the traditional completers. Perhaps employers also need to be made aware of their actions and the assigned work responsibilities.

Major endeavors will be needed to reach the goal of substantial and widespread nontraditional vocational enrollment. Educators and employers must carefully assess attitudes of students toward nontraditional enrollments; the availability of support systems such as teachers, parents, guidance counselors, co-workers, and supervisors; and the opinion of the job market toward students who want to pursue nontraditional careers. Special efforts will be needed if students are to succeed in education and careers which are considered to be nontraditional.

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